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HD **No appetite for an early election, but B.C. NDP prepares campaign nonetheless; Minority government still has work to do, Premier says**

BY Justine Hunter

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VICTORIA

British Columbia's minority government has defied the odds, marking 28 months in power without its hold on power being tested. But New Democrats were warned Sunday they must ready for an early provincial election.

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Bob Dewar, special adviser to Premier John Horgan and a principal author of the agreement with the Green Party that has given the NDP enough seats to govern, cautioned delegates at the party's convention in Victoria against complacency.

"At any time that minority situation could fall," he said. "Life happens. We could lose one or two people on a vote." Throughout the weekend, New Democrats were reminded that while the Green-NDP alliance has appeared largely seamless, there has been a relentless demand on elected officials to be in the legislature for every vote because the balance of power is so close. "Every day we have to have [the Greens'] support in the legislature in order to get all that stuff completed and passed," Mr. Dewar said.

The party's executive director, Raj Sihota, said the party is in a permanent state of election preparedness. "I always joke we're just maybe a couple of bad polls away. So we've never really slowed down after the election; it's been full force on fundraising, on campaign training and just learning our lessons from the last campaign."

Ms. Sihota said that the party has thrived under the province's new campaign finance law, which ended "big money" donations that favoured the opposition Liberals. For the first time in living memory, she said, the BC NDP is debt-free.

The next provincial election is scheduled to take place in October, 2021, but Premier Horgan spent the weekend testing campaign themes, rallying party activists and pleading for unity as some of the party's strongest labour allies dig in for a messy fight with their NDP government.

While hundreds of teachers protested outside the convention hall, demanding more public funding to settle their contract negotiations, Mr. Horgan told convention delegates that his government needs more time to implement the commitments it made to voters in 2017.

From investments in the social safety net to climate action and legislation advancing Indigenous rights, Mr. Horgan said his government has met 80 per cent of the commitments set out in the last election

campaign. “Imagine how much more we can do if we stick together," he said. "If we focus on that, we can’t lose. That’s our super power.”

The BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) held an emergency session next door to the convention, where union president Teri Mooring called on the NDP to offer up additional funding to settle a contract with the province’s 45,000 public school teachers. “Our low wages and the labour shortage must be addressed,” she told her members. “That’s going to take more funding than the government has put on the table.”

An official from the BC Federation of Labour, Laird Cronk, shuttled between the two meetings as a diplomat, while NDP delegates ran a gauntlet of angry teachers on their way into their convention. “I had one delegate willing to exchange ideas, the rest are pretending they are deaf,” said Catherine Alpha, an elementary-school teacher who handed out leaflets outside the party convention. She worked for the NDP in the last election, but says she’ll vote Green next time. “I’m done with the NDP. This is an intense betrayal of the students in my classroom.”

Inside, Mr. Horgan insisted that his party and the BCTF share the same values. “What we have is a dispute between parties in a collective bargaining negotiation,” he told reporters. His government maintains it cannot offer teachers more money without triggering costly payouts to other public-sector unions. And, Mr. Horgan reminded delegates, his government has already increased education funding by $1-billion, hiring 4,000 new teachers since taking power in 2017.

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